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“BUSINESS & SECURITY”

Robert Zoellick

&

Serge Schmemmann

13 April 2016

On Wednesday, 13 April 2016, the Académie Diplomatique Internationale and the Harvard Club of France co-hosted a “Harvard Dialogue,” featuring former World Bank Chairman, Robert Zoellick, in conversation with Serge Schmemmann, member of the Editorial Board of the New York Times. The event was attended by more than 130 diplomats, business executives, policy analysts, journalists and other professionals involved in finance and international affairs.

The Tribune was convened as a “conversation” between Mr. Zoellick and Mr. Schmemmann before being opened to the floor of questions. Mr. Schmemmann began by observing that Mr. Zoellick had joined other representatives of the Republic Party in an open letter, issued on 2 March 2016, opposing Donald Trump’s candidacy for President of the United States. Mr. Zoellick replied that the current political situation was marked by a high degree of uncertainty, and that the fear of terrorism is having a significant influence on the election process. Mr. Zoellick stated that many Americans have a sense of “emotional destabilization” fuelled by extended periods of war, reduced influence in global affairs, and the growing influence of Russia and China. As a result, Mr. Zoellick observed, Americans are seeking a leader who will take a strong and unambiguous stance.

To a question on China’s evolving role, Mr. Zoellick, who was responsible for bringing China into the World Trade Organization, argued that with WTO membership China has been compelled to joining the international community in addressing such issues as climate change. He stated that the force driving Chinese leadership is not economics but rather political, that is, to secure the Communist Party’s position in China. This raises the question, Mr. Zoellick noted, that an economic slowdown in China could threaten the stability of the Communist Party and might give rise to a greater sense of nationalism. On the question of the effect of loosening the restriction on China’s one-child policy, he stated that “China will grow old before it grows rich” and that until now loosening the policy has had little effect.

Mr. Zoellick commented on the recent release of the Panama Papers, more than eleven million pages of confidential financial dealings by a Panama-based law firm, noting that he “feels badly” for Panama as a country, since it is not the responsibility of Panama but the individual countries to demand higher disclosure standards for their public officials who try to hide their wealth in offshore havens.

Commenting on social issues, Mr. Zoellick argued that demographics drive a great many factors, and pointed to Africa where demographics indicate potential for great economic growth and to Mexico,

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which, although it has problems with organized crime, is taking on major reforms. In the US the private sector continues to be a place of innovation but the public sector is not reforming quickly enough. He also stated that “globalization” has become a bad word both in the United States and in France, that free trade is becoming an ever more difficult agenda topic, and that some in the United States are arguing for their country to leave NAFTA. He argued that if the US does not pass the Trans-Pacific-Partnership, it is committing economic suicide.